

Uhrich, Mark, and Dennis Wentz. “Environmental Setting of the Willamette Basin.” Portland: U. S. Geological Survey, 1999. (Reviewed by Kate Koehler)

The 1999 USGS publication, entitled “Environmental Setting of the Willamette Basin, Oregon” is an excellent overview source on the land use, and its history, of the Willamette Basin. It is part of a larger National Water-Quality Assessment Program which documents “status and trends of more than 50 large river basins and aquifer systems.” It examines all the “natural and human related, land based factors that have the potential to influence the physical, chemical, and/or biological quality of its surface and ground water resources.” Specifically, this report focuses on the history and development of the Willamette Basin, in reference to the various ecoregions, hydrology, land use/cover, climate, and crop types.

The report begins by looking at the settling of the basin by non-Native Americans, which began in the first decade of the 19th century, with Lewis and Clark. Lewis and Clark documented a route for future settlement, and between 1840 and 1860 some 53,000 people headed west to Oregon. These people built Oregon's economy by raising livestock and growing crops such as wheat, potatoes, and legumes. By the mid 1800's, the Willamette Valley had developed “distinct regions of agriculture.” Agriculture is now the chief industry in Oregon. Besides producing crops, Oregon also leads the nation in timber production. Much of that timber comes from the basin.

This document also talks about the continuous population growth since 1850, as well as explaining the various ecoregions of the basin. It also examines the relationship between the ecoregions, hydrology, and climate. In the land use section, it divides the valley into various land use zones, as well as focusing specifically on agriculture. It explains the crops the basin exports; the basin “provides 98% of the nation's hazelnuts, 80-90 percent of its caneberries (blackberries and raspberries), and 27 percent of its peppermint.” This report concludes by explaining how the environmental setting has directly controlled the economic development of this area, such as the timber and agricultural industries.

Critique

This 20-page report is written for the layperson and very easy to understand. It includes a lot of useful information about the *history* of land use, something I have not come across during previous research. The format of this report is well organized, complete with charts, maps, and numerous sources.

This report lacks in-depth analysis. Although it explains the various types of land-use, it does not go into the implications of this land use. What will happen if we continue to export timber? What affects is the agricultural industry having on the soils? This document provides basic background information, but does not give numerous details. However it states that more detailed information, about subjects such as the implications from pesticide use, can be found in other documents. Those other documents include ones published as part of the National Water-Quality Assessment Program.

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